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TAGS: PREL PINS MOPS CT FR

SUBJECT: C.A.R.: FRENCH HOPEFUL BUT NOT CONVINCED
REGARDING PEACE INITIATIVES

REF: A. BANGUI 61

¶B. BANGUI 62

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, 1.4 (b/d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: MFA C.A.R. desk officer Daniel Westerink on April 28 said that the GOF was encouraged by the recent peace pact engineered by President Bozize and UFDR leader Damane but was not convinced that this arrangement would prove significant because of uncertainty over whether other UFDR elements would respect it. Westerink provided details about French military deployments in C.A.R. and of France's desire to have FOMUC, perhaps at the beginning of 2008, extend its area of operations eastward, to include Birao, which would allow the French to withdraw French forces from Birao and ensconce them at the French base near the Bangui airport. The GOF, however, faced questions about FOMUC's future (whether it would continue to be a CEMAC operation or whether ECCAS might also become involved). Moreover, Westerink reported EU misgivings about extending FOMUC's area of responsibility, as this might conflict or overlap with planning for an international peacekeeping force along the C.A.R.-Sudan-Chad borders. Westerink made clear that reducing the French role in backstopping the C.A.R. military in Birao was a high French priority. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) MFA C.A.R. desk officer Daniel Westerink on April 18 offered comments on the recent peace agreement brokered by President Bozize and UFDR leader Damane (reftels) in Birao within the Syrte process. Westerink said that the deal offered hope but that France was reserving judgment in order to see if the arrangement proved to be real and effective. He noted that many "arrangements" and "deals" of this type, large and small, had been concluded in recent years in that part of Africa and that many had turned out to be meaningless, with neither side respecting them practically from the moment they had been signed. This agreement, he said, might prove to be different, but only time would tell. Westerink said that an important concern was that UFDR elements imprisoned in Cotonou would reject Damane's deal outright, just as they had rejected the Syrte formula on previous occasions.

¶13. (C) Westerink commented that Bozize did not help matters by celebrating, on March 15, the fourth anniversary of his coming to power. That he came to power by leading an armed rebellion, and was now celebrating that victory, was not the kind of signal one should send when confronted by, and at the same time trying to make peace with, rebel elements seeking

to accomplish the same thing, Westerink observed dryly.

FRENCH FORCES

¶4. (C) Westerink said that France did not want Birao to become a permanent, or quasi-permanent, base for French troops. France would be willing to send troops there to reinforce the C.A.R. military as needed, but wanted to keep them stationed near Bangui. (NOTE: According to DAO sources, reported septel, the French may be willing to remain in Birao until the rainy season is in full swing late in May, effectively ending any combat in the region. The French may leave a forward air controller in the area indefinitely, for close air support, or until FOMUC or other forces are capable of securing Birao. DAO septel report will contain more precise figures on French forces and their disposition. END NOTE.)

FOMUC

¶5. (C) One way to facilitate the departure of French forces from Birao would be to have FOMUC extend its areas of operation into eastern C.A.R., including Birao. Westerink said that France was pursuing this possibility and hoped to achieve FOMUC's acceptance when its mandate would be renewed at the beginning of 2008. He said it was too late to accomplish this by the time of the next mandate extension in June 2007.

¶6. (C) However, the question of whether FOMUC would remain a CEMAC operation or become, in whole or part, an ECCAS operation (CEEAC in French), was a complication, Westerink noted. While ECCAS, which includes more countries than CEMAC and which covers a broader geographic area, might present

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advantages, it posed several problems as well. First, it was less France-oriented. The CEMAC countries were all members of the franc zone and were well versed in French thinking, concerns, and ways and means. This was not the case with the ECCAS countries. Moreover, Rwanda was a member of ECCAS, and, given the poor state of Rwanda-France relations, could serve as an obstacle regarding anything France might want to accomplish with ECCAS regarding C.A.R. Westerink indicated that the GOF was continuing to think of ways to extend FOMUC's range, taking into account the possible effects of CEMAC and/or ECCAS involvement.

EUROPEAN UNION

¶7. (C) A further issue, Westerink mentioned, was the EU, which had expressed concern about FOMUC's operating in eastern C.A.R. Although he did not specify or provide details about the EU's interest, Westerink indicated that Brussels may worry that any expansion of FOMUC's area of operations in eastern C.A.R. could complicate planning for the deployment of an international peacekeeping force into the tri-border area of eastern and northeastern C.A.R., possibly as a part of a larger peacekeeping plan involving Chad and Sudan as well as C.A.R.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: Westerink made clear that relieving France of the duty of backstopping the C.A.R. military in Birao is a high French priority. Accomplishing that without leaving C.A.R. vulnerable at that strategic location is proving to be difficult and may take many months, if Westerink's scenario develops as he described it. That said, it appears that the French are willing to provide assistance to Birao if circumstances require during the interim. END COMMENT.